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Another Bible study on illegal immigration

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[So well-received was my first Bible study on illegal immigration](#), I decided to write another one.

I can tell you from personal experience, it is rare when you can write about what the Bible says or suggests about a certain topic without attracting some heavy flak. To my astonishment and joy, I did not receive even one critical e-mail about a column that was read by many thousands of people.

Maybe this follow-up will bring out the naysayers.

With my first effort, I purposely approached the issue of illegal immigration with Scriptures I had never before seen applied to this particular debate. Instead of dealing with the people we call illegal aliens, I dealt with the larger picture of what it means to be a nation-state.

Countless Bible studies have been conducted in America in recent years using some familiar citations about "strangers" and "aliens" and applying them to our current controversy.

(Column continues below)

Leviticus 19:33-34: And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Exodus 22:21: Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9: Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:19: Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Some churches have stopped right there after reading that verse and decided they know all they need to know about their duty as Christians to illegal aliens.

"We're supposed to treat them just like one born among us, according to the Bible," they proclaim. "That means amnesty. It means all the benefits of citizenship."

But hold on there, partner. Not so fast. You can develop some really bad theology – not to mention politics – by reading the Bible out of context, by not fully understanding what is being said to whom and about whom.

Strangers that sojourn with you or live with you does not equate with illegal aliens. In fact, the corollary here, in each and every case, is that the children of Israel were "strangers" in Egypt. That's why they were to treat their own "strangers" well, because they knew what it is like to be "strangers" in a foreign land.

Clearly, then, what it means to be a "stranger" is to be a foreigner. In the case of the children of Israel in Egypt, they were *invited* and, at first anyway, were *honored* guests. Later, they would be oppressed by a generation who "knew not Joseph." But they were certainly not trespassers. They were certainly not in Egypt illegally. They were certainly not breaking the laws of the land by being in Egypt. In fact, they were commanded not to offend their hosts in any way (Genesis 46:28-34).

So, we must conclude that "stranger" does not equal "illegal alien." Even when the term "alien" is used in the Bible, it seems to have the exact same meaning as "stranger."

God loves the stranger, we're told. You should, too. They should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be mistreated. These foreigners should be given food and clothing when they are in need. That's the clear message of the Bible – treat law-abiding foreigners and aliens with love and compassion.

The aliens and strangers of the Bible were expected to obey the Hebrew laws, though they were exempt from some. They were also treated differently than the children of

Israel in that they could not own property; they could be bought as slaves and charged interest on loans.

Only if these aliens and strangers were fully converted as Jews – and that included circumcision – could they be landowners, partake of the Passover and be fully integrated into the nation of Israel.

In other words, even though the aliens and strangers of the Bible were *not* illegal aliens, they were still expected to fully assimilate into the Hebrew religion and culture before they could receive all the blessings and all the responsibility of full citizenship.

Further, keep in mind these godly instructions were meant not just for the governing authorities in Israel – the judges and kings – but, more importantly, for the people. These were personal instructions. And they are clearly good instructions for us all today.

If we want to be compassionate to the strangers and aliens of our world today, those law-abiding foreigners who desperately want to come to America and are patiently awaiting their turn, we need to be certain they don't get squeezed out unfairly by those who broke the law and pushed ahead of them in line.

We shouldn't be mean to those lawbreakers either. We shouldn't mistreat them. We should even forgive them. But they have to leave.

They haven't been invited. They are not our guests. They are not just strangers; they are trespassers. They need to go back home and get in line like everyone else waiting to enter our country lawfully.

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